FOOD SAFETY AND INSPECTION SERVICE

Submitted for the Record

Statement of Dr. Elsa A. Murano, Under Secretary for Food Safety
Before the Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration and Related Agencies

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, I am glad to have the opportunity to speak with you regarding the status of the Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) programs and on the fiscal year (FY) 2005 budget request for food safety within the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).

In Washington, people talk about their inspiring view of the Capitol or the monuments, and the sights that inspire them to work harder and better. The view in my office is quite awesome – at once humbling and challenging. I am referring to a famous portrait on my wall of Louis Pasteur, examining a spinal cord sample. Pasteur disagreed with the popular attitude of the day, "science for science's sake;" he felt that science as a purely academic exercise did not properly serve the people of the 19th century. Instead, he believed that science should have practical applications that could be used to improve the lives of others. As we begin the new year at USDA, I am proud to highlight several areas in which we have used science to improve public health during the past year. I also will share with you our goals for this year, and will conclude with a discussion of the FY 2005 budget request.

First though, I want to briefly touch on the Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) issue. Since December 23, 2003, BSE has been "front and center" with us, as it has with everyone who

has concerns about public health and food safety. Upon learning of the BSE find, we immediately took action to protect the public's health. New regulations were published on January 12th, a mere two weeks after the BSE case was announced – truly a remarkable example of how quickly the Bush Administration responded to this threat. The removal of specified risk material (SRM) (brain, spinal cord, etc.) from the food supply, which was the hallmark of these new regulations, was indeed the single most significant step we could have taken to protect the public's health. To ensure that these measures are implemented effectively, part of the FY 2005 budget request that I will discuss later consists of $3 million for the agency to conduct surveillance of SRM and advanced meat recovery (AMR). We are confident that the aggressive BSE measures we have developed will continue to protect the U.S. food supply.

Significant Food Safety Advancements of 2003

The American public remains confident in the safety of the U.S. meat supply – and with good reason. The confidence is due, in part, to the significant advancements that we made during 2003. One such advancement has been the dramatic decline in pathogen levels in regulatory samples. Late last year, we released data that showed a 25 percent drop in the percentage of positive *Listeria monocytogenes* samples from the previous year, and a 70 percent decline compared with years prior to the implementation of the Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) program. In June 2003, to further reduce the incidence of *Listeria monocytogenes*, we issued regulations for establishments producing ready-to-eat products.

Our measures to prevent *E. coli* O157:H7 contamination of ground beef have yielded similar results. In September 2002, based on evidence that *E. coli* O157:H7 is a hazard reasonably

likely to occur at all stages of handling raw beef products, FSIS issued a directive requiring all establishments that produce raw beef products to reassess their HACCP plans. Last year, FSIS' scientifically trained personnel conducted the first-ever comprehensive audits of more than 1,000 beef establishments' HACCP plans. A majority of those plants made major improvements based on their reassessments, and, as a result, we are seeing a substantial drop in the percentage of ground beef samples that are positive for *E. coli* O157:H7. In 2003, of the ground beef samples collected and analyzed for *E. coli* O157:H7, only 0.30 percent tested positive, compared to 0.78 percent in 2002 – a 62 percent reduction. This is a definite improvement, and the strongest signal that science can drive down the threat from pathogens.

In 2002, we issued new enforcement procedures for the *Salmonella* performance standard that are paying off. Instead of waiting for three cycles of tests for *Salmonella*, the failure of the first set now triggers an FSIS review of an establishment's HAACP plan. Due to this process and other science-based initiatives, the percentage of "A" samples (a sample from a randomly scheduled initial set) positive for *Salmonella* in raw meat and poultry has dropped by 65% over the past six years. Out of the number of random "A" samples collected and analyzed by FSIS during 2003, only 3.8 percent of the samples were positive for *Salmonella*, as compared with 10.6 percent in 1998. Again, this is very good news. The data for these three pathogens validate our scientific approach to improving public health through safer food.

We also had a striking decline in the number of meat and poultry product recalls last year. In fact, the number of Class I recalls has nearly been cut in half from the total during 2002. This is

a dramatic indicator that our scientifically-based policies and programs are working to ensure that the American public receives the safest food possible.

FSIS has also had great success with its food safety education programs. Through new and innovative methods, FSIS is sharing its food safety message with the general public, including culturally diverse and underserved populations and those at highest risk for foodborne illnesses. From March to November 2003, the USDA Food Safety Mobile traveled over 24,000 miles and participated in 87 events in 64 cities across the country, providing information and publications on food safety to approximately 179,000 people face-to-face and making an estimated 64.4 million media impressions. Another success story is a public service announcement (PSA) featuring former Miss America Heather Whitestone McCallum, which has aired 14,448 times since September 2003. This PSA ranked in the top 3% of all PSA's shown during the month of January 2004 along with PSA's by the American Red Cross, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). We are very proud of these far-reaching FSIS food safety education campaigns.

Challenges for 2004

Despite the advancements we made last year, there is always room for improvement, and FSIS has identified challenges for 2004. Louis Pasteur said, "In the realm of science, luck is only granted to those who are prepared." Food safety is too important to be left to guess work or luck; we must be prepared to identify and meet challenges head-on.

When I joined USDA over two years ago, I established five goals – a roadmap of improvements for our food safety mission:

- To improve the management and effectiveness of our regulatory programs;
- To ensure that policy decisions are based on science;
- To improve coordination of food safety activities with other public health agencies;
- To enhance public education; and
- To protect FSIS regulated products from intentional contamination.

Through reflection and refinement, we have outlined specific initiatives to make sure we fulfill those goals, thereby improving health outcomes for American families. These initiatives were outlined in our food safety vision document, *Enhancing Public Health: Strategies for the Future*. This detailed plan will continue to drive our policies and actions during this calendar year.

Initiative One: Training

In April 2003, FSIS inaugurated new Food Safety Regulatory Essentials (FSRE) training, which is designed to better equip inspection personnel in verifying an establishment's HACCP food safety system. All trainees received training in the fundamentals of inspection, covering the Rules of Practice, Sanitation Performance Standards, and Sanitation Standard Operating Procedures. FSIS also provides food safety training based on the types of products being produced at the establishments where inspectors are assigned. As of the end of last year, more than 1,000 individuals had completed this training regime.

During 2004, FSIS will continue to train all new entry level slaughter establishment inspectors and veterinary medical officers in technical, regulatory and public health methods. We are also looking at expanding the types of training in the future to meet evolving agency needs and challenges.

Initiative Two: Furthering the Use of Innovative Food Safety Technologies

I believe that we must encourage the use of safe and effective interventions. One way we can encourage such intervention is by hosting public meetings. In January, in Omaha, Nebraska, FSIS held a public meeting to discuss the development and use of new food safety technologies to enhance public health. The meeting generated useful ideas regarding how plants can best utilize new technologies in their operations.

FSIS established a New Technology Office in August 2003. This group is tasked with reviewing new technologies and, where appropriate, expediting the use of new technologies at meat and poultry official establishments and egg products plants. Our New Technology staff is an experienced team of 9 veteran FSIS employees who serve as the single portal for all new technology submissions. We designed this group to better manage the new technology process and allow for implementation as quickly as possible. They also ensure that FSIS personnel are aware of new technologies and where they are being used.

To increase the pool of new technology submissions to the agency, we have established an e-mail address, *FSISTechnology@fsis.usda.gov*, through which parties may submit their

information. I am happy to report that we have received over 30 Notifications and Protocols for new food safety technologies since we have streamlined the submission process. Of the 27 Notifications received, 19 have been issued letters indicating that FSIS has no objections, and 4 are still pending. Once the agency issues a no objection letter, the firm that submitted the proposal may use the new technology.

Initiative Three: Risk Assessment Coordination

In order to better focus its resources on food safety risk assessment activities, FSIS established a risk assessment coordination team with USDA-wide membership. As risk assessment becomes increasingly important as a means of providing the science behind policy decisions, the need for such a group within USDA is clear. This group will promote scientifically sound risk assessments and foster research to support risk assessments.

Microbial risk assessment is still in its infancy compared to chemical risk assessments, so the need to share ideas and resources is critical. In November 2003, we started this interactive process by holding a public meeting to discuss how the government uses the three components of the risk analysis framework – risk assessment, risk management, and risk communication – to inform and implement risk management decisions. In particular, we examined several crucial elements for FSIS to consider in its risk assessments, including how:

- FSIS can improve the transparency of the risk analysis process;
- FSIS can balance the need for transparency, stakeholder involvement and peer review with the need for timely scientific guidance; and

- Risk assessments can better inform policy development and decision-making.

Initiative Four: Developing a Research Agenda

In November 2003, FSIS and the Research, Education and Economics mission area, announced a unified research agenda to coordinate USDA food safety research priorities and needs. For FSIS, research is critical to achieving its public health vision. Although FSIS does not conduct research itself, the agency must identify its research needs based on its public health goals so that the research community can meet them. The unified agenda includes research to:

- Investigate the ecology, epidemiology, virulence and genetic characteristics related to pathogenicity for *E. coli* O157:H7, *Salmonella*, *Listeria monocytogenes*, and other foodborne pathogens to identify targeted control measures;
- Develop effective on-farm, feedlot, transportation, handling, and other pre-processing intervention strategies for reducing the incidence and levels of antibiotic resistant microorganisms and key foodborne pathogens in meat, poultry, eggs and fresh produce;
- Develop, validate, and transfer technology of new and improved processing methods to reduce or eliminate key foodborne pathogens in meat, poultry, fresh produce, seafood, and ready-to-eat foods; and
- Develop rapid and sensitive detection methods for abnormal prions to prevent the possible spread of transmissible spongiform encephalopathies.

Initiative Five: To Develop Best Practices for Animal Production

In consultation with producers, researchers, and other stakeholders, FSIS is developing a list of best management practices for animal production in order to provide guidance for reducing pathogen loads before slaughter.

Last September, FSIS arranged a symposium with USDA partners to discuss ways to significantly reduce the levels of *E. coli* O157:H7 in live animals before slaughter. We understand that preventing the spread of *E. coli* and other pathogens on the farm is vital to increasing food safety and protecting public health. The dialogue generated at the meeting helped us develop guidelines outlining the best management practices at the pre-harvest stage, which we expect to publish this year. Once these guidelines are published, FSIS will initiate an aggressive outreach effort to distribute them to producers.

Initiative Six: Baseline Studies

It is imperative that FSIS develops baseline studies. FSIS is developing protocols to conduct continuous baseline studies to determine the nationwide prevalence and levels of various pathogenic microorganisms in raw meat and poultry. The studies will help the agency and the industry to better understand what interventions are working or how they could be improved. To achieve the agency's goal of applying science to all policy decisions, the FY 2004 budget included a new $1.7 million initiative to establish a continuous baseline program for risk assessments and performance measurement.

In the past, baseline studies have been used to establish pathogen reduction performance standards, which are an important part of verifying the sanitary operation of meat and poultry

establishments. The new baseline studies will take into account regional variation, seasonality and other critical factors.

The continuing nature of the baseline studies will provide information on national trends and a tool to assess performance of initiatives designed to reduce the prevalence of pathogens in meat and poultry products. These baseline studies will also yield important information for conducting risk assessments that can outline steps we can take to reduce foodborne illness.

These surveys will also be important in establishing the link between foodborne disease and ecological niches, as well as levels and incidence of pathogens in meat and poultry. The net result will be more targeted interventions and the effective elimination of sources of foodborne microorganisms.

Initiative Seven: Food Biosecurity

While the events of September 11, 2001, brought the issue of the vulnerability of our food supply to the forefront, FSIS' food biosecurity efforts did not start on September 12, 2001. FSIS' 100 plus years worth of experience in dealing with food emergencies have allowed the agency to develop the expertise to protect the U.S. meat, poultry, and egg products supply wherever and whenever emergencies or new threats arise.

It is imperative that FSIS coordinates with other public health agencies to protect the food supply against intentional harm. The agency has improved such coordination, as well as strengthened

existing efforts to prevent, detect, and respond to food-related emergencies resulting from acts of terrorism. With a strong food safety infrastructure already in place, FSIS has been able to focus on strengthening existing programs and improving lines of communication, both internally and externally. Later, when I discuss the FY 2005 budget request, I will describe the components of our food and agriculture defense initiative.

Achieving the Next Level of Food Safety

The emergence of previously unrecognized pathogens, as well as new trends in food distribution and consumption, highlights our need for new strategies to reduce the health risks associated with pathogenic microorganisms in meat, poultry and egg products. Through analysis and discussions with stakeholders, we have identified three issues that need to be addressed to attain the next level of public health protection.

Issue One: To anticipate/predict risk through enhanced data integration.

To better anticipate risks involving meat and poultry products, we must have the best available data to clearly identify the extent and nature of these risks, so that we may determine an effective response. These data consist of regulatory samples, as well as samples collected by food processing establishments. Thus, we must improve data analysis while encouraging data sharing from all reliable sources.

With regard to food biosecurity, FSIS works closely with the White House Homeland Security Council, DHS, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the USDA Homeland Security Staff to develop strategies to protect the food supply from an intentional attack. For example,

FSIS, along with FDA and industry partners, is working with DHS to establish new food information sharing and analysis activity for the food sector. This public/private partnership will aid thin the protection of the critical food infrastructure by centralizing the information about threats, incidents, and vulnerabilities.

Issue Two: To improve the application of risk analysis to regulatory and enforcement activities.

Food safety problems need to be documented as they occur, so that conditions may be analyzed and, if need be, corrected. A better understanding of the prevalence and causes of food safety failures could allow better assessment of how to best address them. Data regarding the causes of food safety violations, either within a specific establishment, or within a class of establishments, can be utilized in order to better focus prevention and regulatory enforcement strategies.

FSIS is exploring the development of a real-time measure of how well an establishment controls the biological, chemical, and physical hazards inherent in its operations. Such a predictive model would help the agency make resource allocation decisions across the country's more than 6,000 meat and poultry establishments to maximize food safety and public health protection.

Issue Three: To better associate program outcomes with public health surveillance data.

We have seen notable advances in preventing foodborne illness, which the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have attributed, in part, to the implementation of HACCP. However, there still is a need to determine how specific policies affect public health. In order to accomplish this, we need to obtain and document data that links foodborne illness outbreaks with specific foods. It may then be linked with prevalence data of specific pathogens in specific foods.

However, to complete the linkage with public health outcomes, we need accurate and timely human health surveillance data.

We have already taken steps to secure such surveillance data, and we continue to update our systems. In 1995, FSIS worked with CDC, FDA, and public health laboratories in several States to establish FoodNet, the Foodborne Diseases Active Surveillance Network, as part of CDC's Emerging Infections Program.

FoodNet includes active surveillance of foodborne diseases, case-control studies to identify risk factors for acquiring foodborne illness, and surveys to assess medical and laboratory practices related to foodborne illness diagnosis. FoodNet provides estimates of foodborne illness and sources of specific diseases that are usually found in the United States, and interprets these trends over time. Data are used to help analyze the effectiveness of the Pathogen Reduction/Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point rule and other regulatory actions, as well as public education aimed at decreasing foodborne disease in the United States. We are also considering establishing a joint task force with CDC to determine ways to improve FoodNet.

In addition to data collected through FoodNet, FSIS is a partner with CDC and State agencies in PulseNet, a national computer network of public health laboratories that helps to rapidly identify outbreaks of foodborne illness. Laboratories perform DNA "fingerprinting" on bacteria that may be foodborne, then the network permits rapid comparison of the "fingerprint" patterns through a CDC database. PulseNet is an early warning system that links seemingly sporadic illnesses, and

enables public health officials to more quickly identify and react to the emergence of multi-State illness outbreaks.

FSIS is also working with CDC's National Center for Infectious Diseases to design and support studies that enable definite connections to be made between occurrence of specific pathogens in specific foods and the occurrence of human foodborne illness.

FoodNet, PulseNet and other similar programs are excellent examples of Federal and State agencies working together to accomplish public health goals. These programs will help FSIS and other regulatory agencies to focus inspection and enforcement on those practices where risk is deemed to be highest, resulting in a more efficient use of government resources.

FY 2005 Budget Request

I will now turn to the FY 2005 budget request for FSIS. In FY 2005, FSIS is requesting a program level of $951.7 million, a net increase of about $61 million from the enacted level for FY 2004. Under current law, we are requesting an appropriation of $838.7 million, with an additional $113 million in existing user fees. The budget request will fund the increased BSE surveillance programs I mentioned earlier, as well as additional training for inspection personnel and numerous programs that will continue to keep FSIS among the leading public health agencies in the world. By continuing the principle of making policy based on sound science, we will modernize our inspection system to handle the challenges of food safety in this century. Implementation of these budget initiatives is imperative to help us attain the public health vision we have set for FSIS.

Supporting FSIS' Basic Mission

The FSIS budget request for FY 2005 supports the agency's basic mission of providing continuous food safety inspection in each meat, poultry, and egg products establishment in the U.S. The budget request includes a $15.5 million increase for pay raises in Federal and State programs. In addition, the budget supports an agency-wide staff-year ceiling of 9,641, an 84 staff year increase from the 2004 appropriation level. The budget reflects the proposed calendar year 2005 pay raise of 1.5 percent for Federal and State personnel, a 0.2 percent increase for employee rewards, and the annualized cost of the 4.1 percent pay increase for calendar year 2004. The costs also include a total net increase of approximately $721,000 for state food safety and inspection.

Two critical elements of FSIS' mission are to continue the enforcement of humane slaughter regulations and to provide for the full cost of front-line inspection. FSIS will continue strict enforcement of its regulations for the humane handling and slaughter of livestock. In FY 2003, over 7,600 inspection personnel stationed in over 6,000 federally inspected meat, poultry, and egg products plants verified that the processing of 43.6 billion pounds of red meat, 49.2 billion pounds of poultry, and 3.7 billion pounds of liquid egg products complied with statutory requirements. The FY 2005 budget request includes a $17.3 million increase for humane slaughter enforcement and the full cost of in-plant inspection. Included in the request is $5.0 million to continue the work funded in FY 2003 for FY 2003 through FY 2004.

The remaining $12.3 million of the $17.3 million is for staff support costs that are critically important to maintaining front line inspection. Over 80 percent of FSIS costs are for salaries, benefits, and travel costs for inspectors to travel between plants. Increases in benefit and travel costs cannot be deferred to another year. The agency's share of employee benefits costs has been rising in recent years by over $4 million annually. The agency has also experienced large increases in retirement costs, hiring incentives, and employee allowances for the purchase of safety equipment and related items. The increase is needed to avoid employment restrictions in the inspection program, which would result if unavoidable cost increases are not fully funded and must be absorbed.

New Initiatives

The FY 2005 request includes a $33.6 million increase for new initiatives that support the Department's goals for FSIS.

First, as I discussed in my opening, the FY 2005 budget request includes an increase of $3 million for BSE surveillance. FSIS' BSE inspection program will add permanent BSE control measures in FY 2005. These control measures will include increased in-plant verification of slaughter plant designs for controlling SRMs, overtime inspection, and travel for Veterinary Medical Officers to test non-ambulatory disabled livestock when they arrive at small slaughter plants that do not have a resident veterinarian. In FY 2005, FSIS will also perform about 60,000 screening tests at processing plants that use AMR equipment, to ensure that SRMs do not enter the food supply.

The FY 2005 budget also requests a $23.5 million increase to support our food and agriculture defense initiative. Food contamination and animal and plant diseases and infestations can have catastrophic effects on human health and the economy. USDA, the Department of Health and Human Services and DHS are working together to create a comprehensive food and agriculture policy that will improve the government's ability to respond to the dangers of disease, pests and poisons, whether natural or intentionally introduced. FSIS' portion of the food and agriculture defense initiative has five components:

- Biosurveillance;
- The Food Emergency Response Network;
- Data systems to support the Food Emergency Response Network;
- Enhancing FSIS laboratory capabilities; and
- Follow-up biosecurity training.

To finance the biosurveillance component of the food and agriculture defense initiative, the FY 2005 budget requests $5 million. The Homeland Security Council (HSC) Biodefense End-to-End Assessment, in cooperation with all relevant U.S. Government agencies, identified early attack warning and surveillance as a top priority to prepare against a potential bioterrorist attack. The HSC supports an interagency biosurveillance initiative to improve the Federal government's ability to rapidly identify and characterize such an attack. This initiative will improve Federal surveillance capabilities in human health, food, agriculture, and environmental monitoring. It will also allow federal agencies to establish integration capability at DHS so that DHS may rapidly compile these streams of data and integrate them with threat information.

FSIS has conducted its own vulnerability assessments of regulated domestic and imported products. The assessments identify potentially vulnerable products and processes, likely threat agents, and points along the production/consumption continuum where attack is most likely to occur. The agency will focus its resources on the points of greatest vulnerability.

The second component of the food and agriculture defense initiative is the Food Emergency Response Network (FERN). A nationwide laboratory system with sufficient capacity to meet the needs of anticipated emergences is integral to any bioterror surveillance and monitoring system. FERN consists of Federal and State governmental laboratories which are responsible for protecting citizens and the food supply from intentional acts of biological, chemical, and radiological terrorism. Currently, over 60 laboratories, including public health and veterinary diagnostic laboratories, representing 27 States and five Federal agencies, have agreed to participate in FERN. The goal is to establish 100 FERN laboratories, creating a network of Federal, State and local laboratories that FSIS could call upon to handle the numerous samples that would be required to be tested in the event of a terrorist attack on the meat, poultry or egg supply.

To improve the infrastructure under FERN, the budget request calls for a $10 million expansion. Of that funding, $6.1 million would be spent on contracts with State and local laboratories, and $2.6 million would be used to establish five Regional Hubs and a National Operating Center to coordinate FERN's efforts and conduct training. In addition, during FY 2005, FSIS would also use $1.3 million to establish five to seven State laboratories for screening of microbiological

agents, with more laboratories in the future, based on the availability of funds. The staff of these laboratories will receive training, perform methods validation, and analyze surveillance and check samples.

The third and fourth components of the food and agriculture defense initiative support FERN. The electronic laboratory exchange network (eLEXNET) is a national, web-based system that allows laboratories to rapidly report and exchange standardized data. The FY 2005 budget request of $4 million will be used to make eLEXNET available to additional FERN and other food-testing laboratories nationwide. Access to properly validated methods used for screening, confirmation, and forensic analysis is critical to all laboratories, and laboratories need rapid access to new or improved methods that use emerging technologies, have greater sensitivity, or are more efficient. FSIS is working with FDA to develop a web-based repository of analytical methods that is compatible with eLEXNET. The budget request also includes $2.5 million to enhance FSIS' laboratory capabilities for detecting new bioterror-associated agents, and to ensure FSIS' capability and capacity to perform the toxin and chemical testing that will be standardized across all FERN laboratories.

The final component of the food and agriculture defense initiative is follow-up biosecurity training for the workforce. Follow-up training is essential as part of the ongoing effort to protect the public by educating the workforce regarding the latest threat agents and countermeasures to those agents. The budget request includes $2 million for follow-up training for FY 2005.

The final new initiative I will discuss is training. FSIS has been criticized over the years by the Government Accounting Office and the Office of the Inspector General for having poorly trained field employees. We have been addressing these concerns over the last year, but need additional resources in order to significantly improve our training. We are requesting $7.1 million – over a 50 percent increase – in the FSIS training budget for FY 2005. Of the requested training budget, $4.0 million would be used to increase the number of entry level inspectors receiving formal classroom training from 20 percent to 100 percent. Under this proposal, all new inspectors will receive formal training on how to identify and respond to food safety problems. New employees will be required to demonstrate mastery of training in order to be certified to assume inspection duties.

The requested training budget also includes $3.1 million for Food Safety Regulatory Essentials training, to supplement training for current on- and off-line field employees to improve enforcement of Pathogen Reduction/Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point regulations and food safety sampling. These frontline employees are responsible for making the critical decisions to ensure that products are safe to eat, so it is essential to have a scientifically and technically trained workforce.

User Fee Proposal

FSIS' FY 2005 budget also includes a legislative proposal to recover the costs of providing inspection services beyond an approved eight-hour primary shift. The proposal was submitted to Congress last August. If the proposal is enacted, the level of appropriated funds needed would be reduced by an estimated $124 million, making the FSIS budget request $714.7 million. Under

current law in 2005, FSIS estimates it will collect $113 million in annual user fees to recover the costs of overtime, holiday, and voluntary inspection.

Closing

We intend to continue to engage the scientific community, public health experts and all interested parties in an effort to identify science-based solutions to public health issues to ensure positive public health outcomes. It is our intention to pursue such a course of action this year in as transparent and inclusive a manner as is possible. The strategies I discussed today will help FSIS continue to pursue its goals and achieve its mission of reducing foodborne illness.

Mr. Chairman, thank you again for providing me with the opportunity to speak with the Subcommittee and submit testimony regarding the steps that FSIS is taking to remain the world leader in public health. I look forward to working with you to improve our food safety system, ensuring that we continue to have the safest food supply in the world.